

***These excerpts are from the Tuesday, August 3, 2004 issue of Canada's Globe and Mail Newspaper.***

## **SHOES WHERE THE POINTE IS PAINLESS**

### **A new design in ballet shoes is winning over dancers tired of chronic pain & injuries**

#### **Health/Fitness/Dance: Anne McIlroy**

For many young ballet dancers, going *en pointe* is a rite of passage and the start of a long and painful relationship with the shoes that allow them to perform gracefully on the very tips of their toes.

"Advil is the drug of choice," says Marisa Ortega, 21, of Toronto. Like most dancers she began dancing en pointe early in her teens. She used to cringe when people used the term "ballet slippers," because it implied the shoes were comfortable. In fact, they hurt her feet so much that at first she didn't want to dance. Like most serious dancers, she continued to work through the pain, accepting it as the cost of doing something she loved. Injuries are also a regular part of a dancer's life.

National Ballet principal dancer Chan Hon Goh had danced through the pain for years, and suffered stress fractures as a young dancer. Seven-and-a-half years ago, she and her husband, Chun Che, a ballet teacher and choreographer, decided they should design a better shoe.

They consulted their fellow dancers on their first three models. For their latest pointe shoe, the Diamond Pointe, they went to sports medicine experts for help in a new design that would reduce the pain and injuries experienced by both young dancers and professional ballerinas.

These injuries include stress fractures and tendonitis, says Julia Alleyne, a sports medicine doctor who went to the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics to look after Canada's athletes and advises the National Ballet. She was happy to offer Ms. Goh suggestions on how to make pointe shoes more foot-friendly.

The new shoes will make a difference for young women in their early teens who are practicing three or four times a week and considering a career in ballet, says Dr. Alleyne.

Many dancers become so accustomed to foot pain that they don't notice the difference between chronic suffering and new pain that is the sign of serious injury. These shoes are more comfortable, and may help dancers detect injuries early, Dr. Alleyne says.

(Diamond Pointes) are winning rave reviews from more experienced dancers like Ms. Ortega, who is studying to be a professional.

"My body is so grateful," she says. She recently rehearsed the same piece twice, once in old shoes, the second time in her new Diamond Pointe shoes. "It felt like two different pieces."

She said it was so much easier for her to roll up on her toes, which weren't scrunched against the toe box. All the muscles in her feet and legs felt aligned as she danced.....

...the arch has more support and cushioning, which helps when dancers go up on their toes and come down. The sole, or shank, is different and designed to reduce injuries. "Girls who start with these shoes may not have to go through the injuries that I had," (Goh) says. "...All our steps are done en pointe, and the way our feet feel is crucial, it affects our longevity."

***These excerpts are from the Tuesday August 3, 2004 issue of Canada's The Globe and Mail Newspaper. [www.theglobeandmail.com](http://www.theglobeandmail.com)***